



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NEWS
The Monthly Electronic Newsletter of
The Bureau of Emergency Management
Division of Emergency Services
N.H. Department of Safety, Richard M. Flynn, Commissioner
33 Hazen Drive
Concord, NH 03305
1-800-852-3792
newsletters@nhoem.state.nh.us

November 2005

AVIAN FLU PANDEMIC EXERCISE CONDUCTED – State Emergency Management and Public Health staff, along with officials in Manchester, Portsmouth and Colebrook conducted the nation's first avian flu pandemic exercise Monday, November 14 through Saturday, November 19. The exercise was ordered by Governor John Lynch to test the state's preparedness for a major outbreak of flu or any type of pandemic. The Division of Public Health set up a Divisional Operations Center at the Health and Human Services Building on Hazen Drive. For a week, Public Health personnel tracked a scenario that involved a University of New Hampshire student returning from Indonesia infected with the disease. On Saturday, the state EOC was activated, along with vaccine Points of Distribution (PODs) in the three communities.

The PODs carried out the critical work of actually delivering vaccine to large numbers of people. Since no vaccine exists for avian flu, local officials operated the clinics to deliver conventional flu shots. Portsmouth administered 565 shots, Manchester provided 618 and Colebrook gave 295. The flu shots were provided free-of-charge.

Meanwhile, avian flu continues to spread around the world. While there have been some human deaths, no cases of human-to-human transmission of the disease have been reported. The human victims, thus far, have all worked with infected poultry and caught the disease from birds. Comparisons have been made in the news media to the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic, but the H5N1 virus will have to mutate to a form that can be transmitted from human-to-human before a pandemic can occur. Medical experts say this is possible, but may not necessarily happen this year. Avian flu has been found in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Russia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Turkey. Most recently, flu-infected ducks were found on at least two poultry farms in British Columbia, but these cases were believed to be a low-pathogenic North American strain of the disease, according to Canadian agriculture authorities.

WEB EOC MAKES DEBUT DURING AVIAN FLU EXERCISE – The avian flu exercise was the first event in which a new computer program for the state Emergency Operations Center was used. WEB EOC is designed to improve communications and eliminate paperwork during EOC activations. The system also has the advantage of being accessed from remote locations, such as other state agencies or local EOCs. The system

keeps a major event log, which was displayed on screens in the EOC. It also allows for messaging from one Emergency Support Function to another and the assignment of tasks. EOCs in Manchester, Portsmouth and Colebrook were able to monitor the major event log during the exercise. EM staff and liaisons from other organizations agreed that the system worked well, even though it was their first time using it. The system's capabilities are being expanded for future operations.

FLOOD AID APPLICATION DEADLINE APPROACHES – Applications to FEMA for Individual Assistance must be filed by December 27. Emergency management directors and municipal officials in communities in Belknap, Cheshire, Grafton, Hillsborough, Merrimack and Sullivan counties should remind anyone who may qualify for federal assistance to register with FEMA and complete applications as soon as possible. Applications will not be accepted after the December 27th deadline. Registration may be done by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (or 1-800-462-7585 for people who are speech or hearing impaired) or on line at www.fema.gov. Assistance is also available through the state or the U.S. Small Business Administration.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TEAMS WORK WITH FLOOD, FLU, VETS - In the weeks following the flooding in Alstead, the need for disaster behavioral health services continued. Members of the Disaster Behavioral Health Response Team (DBHRT) volunteered for service in the Disaster Recovery Centers that were set up in Keene and Alstead. Formal critical incident stress debriefings will be held as needed. Recently when bodies of the missing were discovered, support for the crews involved in those discoveries was provided. The Disaster Behavioral Health Liaison offers ongoing consultation to key stakeholders in Alstead to plan for the long-term mental health needs of that community during their recovery process.

Disaster Behavioral Health Response team members were actively involved in the planning and delivery of services for the avian flu exercise. Team members were positioned in each of the three PODs to provide a compassionate presence, psychological first aid and intervention, as needed. Eighteen DBHRT members participated in this effort.

Paul Deignan, Fred White, Geoff Souther and Colonel Deb Carter were invited to make a presentation to the annual meeting of the National Association of State Mental Health Directors on December 11, 2005, regarding New Hampshire's collaborative effort in "Operation Welcome Home" initiated by Governor Lynch to meet the emotional needs of returning troops and their families.